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Export date: Fri Oct 30 17:52:50 2026 / +0000 GMT

Monthly Message: The sweet work of community fuel Streams Creative Hub

I grew up on a small island, in a small community where people still answered their doors. Not because they were expecting a delivery. Not because they were waiting on the company. Because it was normal. Because you knew your neighbours. Because if someone knocked, you opened.

And on some weekends, the person knocking was me.

When I was a child in Saint Lucia, my neighbour Stacy and I had a rhythm. We'd take turns each weekend, one Saturday in her mom's kitchen, the next in mine. Our moms would guide us, keep us from burning the place down, and we'd bake as it mattered.

Cupcakes. Muffins. Banana bread. Carrot cake. Rice Krispies treats.

We weren't running a business. We didn't have a spreadsheet. We didn't even have a goal. We just had the kind of joy that makes you forget to check the clock.

I still remember grating carrots for carrot cake, how it took forever, or at least it felt like forever when you're young, and your arms get tired halfway through. But we did it anyway. We laughed. We tasted the batter. We learned what it meant to make something with your hands and your whole heart.

Then we'd wrap everything up and go door to door. We were rarely, if ever, turned away.

People came to expect us after a while. They'd smile when they opened the door. Sometimes they'd already have cash in hand. Sometimes they'd ask what we made that week. Sometimes they'd just stand there and talk for a minute, because connection was part of the exchange, whether we realized it or not.

Looking back, what I remember is the feeling: making something, sharing it, and being welcomed. In those kitchens and on those doorsteps, we were learning the sweet work of community.

Baking has always been part of my story. Even now, it's therapeutic for me. It slows my nervous system down. It gives my mind something steady to hold onto. It's one of the ways I process life without needing to explain it.

And even though I haven't made a career of it (yet), it is still part of my legacy, my history, my makeup. It is one of the ways I express love for family and friends. If you've ever dropped off banana bread to a friend who's having a hard week, or made cupcakes for a birthday because it felt more personal than buying them, or cooked something from scratch just to say I care about you without needing the perfect words, you know what I mean.

A lot of us have something like that. Maybe it's baking. Maybe it's woodworking. Maybe it's music, gardening, painting, sewing, writing, fixing engines, or building Lego worlds with your kids on the living room floor.

Whatever form it takes, there is something deeply human about making. And I believe that when we nurture that from a young age, when we help children and youth use creativity to connect, express, imagine, contribute, and heal, we help build healthier communities.

That is part of why Streams exists.

Yes, we teach children and youth how to sing, act, paint, write, and make. But just as importantly, we give them a place to belong while they do it. A third space outside of home and school where they can be seen, supported, and celebrated. A place where they can discover what is already inside them and begin to share it with the world around them.

And maybe that is part of what creativity has always been for. Not performance for performance's sake. Not just talent on display. But a way of building connection. A way of making room. A way of passing something meaningful from one person to another.

That is why I'm especially looking forward to June.

Next month is Streams Month, our annual celebration when the life of the Hub spills out into the community. We'll be cheering on students at our Spring Student Showcase on May 31, filling Shelburne Town Hall with the work of youth and emerging artists during our Art Gallery Takeover from June 5 to 26, and bringing our Centre Stage students into the spotlight in Disney's Finding Nemo Jr. on June 5, 6, and 7. There will also be Family Fuse Game Night on June 20 and our Summer Kickoff Open House and Free BBQ on June 26.

In other words, lots of opportunities to gather in community.

You can find all the details at streamshub.org/streamsmonth.

If you've been curious about Streams from afar, June is a beautiful time to come closer. Come visit. Bring your family. Invite a friend.

And if you're reading this thinking, I have something I could teach the next generation, I want you to know: we want you here. Especially to our seniors and seasoned neighbours, your gifts, stories, skills, and patience matter. Streams is not just for kids. It is for the community.

If you'd like to help sustain this work so more children and youth can access safe, creative spaces, your giving makes a real difference.

Thanks for reading. Thanks for opening the door. That, too, is part of the sweet work of community.

This week's Community Voice submis-sion was written by Juli-Anne James, ex-ecutive director of Streams Creative Hub.